



# Idaho Naturalist news

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## Swan Safe Power Line Project

*Text condensed by Sara Focht, IDFG from "[Swan Safe Recap](#)" (T.&W. Brockish)*



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In October 2015, a remarkable partnership of individuals, conservation organizations, government agencies, and a local electrical power cooperative came together to permanently resolve a long-standing problem of Trumpeter Swan power line fatalities. From the first roadside meeting in early September to the last foot of cable laid less than two months later, people rallied to the Swan Safe Project with great enthusiasm in an inspiring display of cooperation, advocacy, and financial support.

Texas Slough (near Rexburg, Idaho) is very attractive to wintering Trumpeter Swans due to its spring-fed open waters and abundance of highly nutritious sago pond weed. When power lines were installed along Texas Slough in the 1980s, today's large numbers of swans were not present. In recent decades, as the population rebounded, increasing numbers were settling into the area for the winter. It had become a wintering swan hotspot. Unfortunately, it had also become a hotspot for power line collisions and swan fatalities.



*This photo of a dead swan was titled, "fallen angel" by Tim and Wendy Brockish, who had been documenting swan fatalities at Texas Slough. The tragic beauty of this photo changed their reaction into action.*

*(Continued on next page)*



The Idaho Naturalist News is a quarterly newsletter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program.

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Beginning back in 2009, conservation groups, the power cooperative and Idaho Department of Fish and Game recognized the problem and tried installing bird diverters on the wires, but swans couldn't see them in the fog. During the winter of 2014-2015, twelve Trumpeter Swans died from power line collisions in a single, one-mile stretch of road. It was clear the power lines needed to be buried.

On September 8th, 2015, Bryan Case, CEO of Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative (FRREC), and his engineers began collaborating with Tim Brockish and Idaho Master Naturalist Wendy Brockish. Consensus emerged; if the needed financial support could be raised, the power lines would be buried. FRREC was a willing partner, but could not pass the full cost of the project to their customers.

With only two months to raise the money and get the cables buried before the swans arrived, the Brockishes took charge, created a fundraising campaign, and gathered support!



Significant financial contributions were made by FRREC, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Fish and Game, the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation and hundreds of individuals. An total of \$114,000 was raised and the lines were buried by October 30th.



*Top: Idaho Master Naturalist Wendy Brockish and a Fall River Electric crew member. Above: Tim Brockish and Trent Yancey, Fall River Electric's Operations Manager onsite at Texas Slough where power lines were buried. Above right: Jay Hansen (Board President), Idaho Master Naturalist Wendy Brockish, Tim Brockish, and Bryan Case CEO of FRREC celebrating a successful project. Right: Safe and sound in Texas Slough, Trumpeter Swans thrive. Photos from Swansafe Facebook page with permission from Wendy Brockish.*

The beautiful fundraising video can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/140015171>

# Bright Wings

*Book Review by Mary McGown, Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter*

I was in a book store before Christmas, shopping for gifts. And I found one - for myself. It is a delightful little book, "Bright Wings," an illustrated anthology of poems about birds. The editor is the renowned poet, Billy Collins, twice poet laureate of the U.S. The illustrations, each scientifically accurate and with a short piece of information about the specific bird, are by the famous bird illustrator, David Allen Sibley. There are nearly 100 poems and about 60 illustrations.

The classic poems you may think of first, such as Poe's raven and Dickinson's "hope is the thing with feathers," are not included. In the introduction by Collins, he explains that they have been showcased in so many books of poetry that "no editorial regrets were felt at the decision to leave them out." Instead, the reader is treated to many lesser-known poems, particularly more contemporary ones, "in order to give the reader a better chance of being taken by surprise."

Not all the poems are by contemporary authors. Catullus, from the late Roman republic; Chaucer, from the Middle Ages; and Thoreau, a nineteenth century Transcendentalist, are represented, for example. The timeframe and the varying styles of the poems highlight how birds have inspired poets over a vast length of time, and how birds as omens and symbols have changed in human perception and expression. The poems are organized, not chronologically, but according to type of bird. Thus, all the poems and illustrations about owls are together. Sea birds, shore birds, raptors, sparrows, hummingbirds, magpies, swallows and an assortment of other birds are among those subject to description, metaphor and philosophizing.

One of my favorites, "On the Marriage of Friends," by Greg Delanty, I imagine was written as a wedding gift to friends. "So you have chosen the way of the swan," the poem begins, and relates the tribulations and joys of marriage to crow-black days and the duet of the black-collared barbet when the first part of the song is sung by one and the second by the mate. The ad man, looking out the window of a skyscraper in New York City, marvels at a peregrine falcon's powerful and acrobatic flight. He muses that the bird has been brought in to clean up the city's dirty problems of too many pigeons. "It's a hired beak." But he also notes that the "thin edge of the falcon's wings had opened the slightest fissure in him and he'd wandered far in thought."

With a naturalist's eye for observation, but a poet's gift for expression, several poems tell the story of an encounter with a bird. Jonathan Aaron, in "Cedar Waxwings," describes how a dozen, then more, kept arriving in their black burglar masks, brown or black throat scarves, olive green jackets and crested hats, yellow trim at the end of their tails. He describes how several may sit together on a branch or wire, passing a piece of fruit back and forth, beak to beak. The poem tells us an adult can hold as many as thirty chokecherries in its crop and regurgitate them one by one into the mouths of its young. "They love to party. Sometimes they get so drunk on overripe berries they keel over and then have to sleep it off." And Billy Collins in the "Christmas Sparrow," relates the story of how his cat brought in the bird through the cat door and how the bird must have spent hours hidden in the branches of the decorated Christmas tree before he "trapped its pulsations in a small towel and carried it to the door, so weightless it seemed to have vanished into the nest of cloth."

The contrast between the illustrations and the poems is stark. The illustrations are detailed and accurate and the accompanying descriptions are factual and precise. The language in the poems sometimes is evocative and sometimes vague. But often with few words and metaphors, the essence of a bird is presented to the reader in a surprising and satisfying way, like this excerpt from "The Cardinal" by Henry Carlile:

He shocks us when he flies                      Like a red verb over the snow.

# A Nature Guide in an Unlikely Location

*Sara Focht, Idaho Master Naturalist Program Coordinator, IDFG*

2015 Idaho Master Naturalist Erika Harmon, from the Sagebrush-steppe Chapter, created a nature guide for the Gem Island Sport's Complex in Emmett, Idaho. Once a 57 acre feedlot, this piece of land attracted bird hunters, as it teamed with wildlife due to close proximity to the Payette River. Gem County purchased the land and turned it into a sports complex. Though turf is not great habitat for most wildlife species, the edges of the complex remain excellent habitat and is used by people to walk their dogs and enjoy the river scenery. The guide Erika created along the 1.2 mile walking trail helps visitors interpret what is left of the wild habitat and some historic evidence. Her guide has 14 points of interest.

Erika involved a local high school teacher (Chuck Alexander, and his students). Students researched and wrote many sections of text for the 14 stops on the tour.



*In addition to birdhouses, beaver chews, and nesting osprey, the guide features many species of common birds, amphibians, and many examples of past and present natural resource management techniques. Photos by Erika Harmon.*

## 2015 Volunteer Hours

Pend Oreille Chapter-Sandpoint	2830.75
Lewis and Clark Chapter-Lewiston	650.50
McCall Chapter-McCall	1033.00
Sagebrush-steppe Chapter-Boise	5570.75
Wood River Valley Chapter-Ketchum	271.25
The Sage School Chapter-Ketchum	354.50
Upper Snake Chapter-Idaho Falls	6947.25
<u>Henry's Fork Chapter-Island Park</u>	<u>2846.75</u>
Total	20,504.75

It is always a pleasure to report the annual Idaho Master Naturalist hours for the year. The program is growing and so are the numbers each year. The year 2015 was exceptional, exceeding the previous year's totals by about 5000 hours! The real measure is of course not the numbers! The real measure and the part that is hard to measure, is the on-the-ground outcomes from the volunteer work by Master Naturalists in Idaho communities! Thank you to all the Idaho Master Naturalists for your time and dedication. Your passion and commitment to converting your *beliefs* into *action* is inspiring.

-Sara Focht, Idaho Master Naturalist Program Coordinator

# MN Builds Little Free Library

Idaho Master Naturalist, Jerry Pugh has used his woodworking skills and interests to complete his Idaho Master Naturalist volunteer hours commitment since he started the program in 2015. Since Jerry works full time for Boise City Parks and Recreation Department, projects that can be worked on at home help him fulfill his volunteer hours and provide valuable products to the Sagebrush-steppe Chapter partnering agencies. His latest contribution is a beautiful “little free library” for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game MK Nature Center. The nature center is always looking for ways to diversify how visitors can interact with the grounds and habitat. This library will be filled with books for kids and adults about nature, wildlife, habitat, and who knows what else will be borrowed, returned and donated.



Jerry has also built an aviary for MK Nature Center’s Peregrine Falcon, assembled insect hotel structures for the Idaho Botanical Garden, and educational carts for the Foothills Learning Center and Idaho Botanical Gardens! In addition, Jerry is the representative for the City of Boise, a partner of the Sagebrush-steppe Chapter. He is one of the few chapter leaders in the state who is also certified in the program.

## Poetry

### Differences

Arthropods scurry and wend,  
Some on six legs, eight legs or ten.  
Mammals walk on two legs or four  
In old age three, if you know the lore.

Our skeletons are in; theirs are out,  
Better in than out, without a doubt.  
Exoskeletons do not grow,  
Molting solves the puzzle though.

Insects, spiders and decapods,  
All together they are arthropods.  
Millions of them live with us,  
They’re in our habitats—and that’s A Plus!

--Alice Crockett, Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter



*Crayfish are common in Idaho’s rivers and streams. Photo by IDFG.*

# Crazy Crayfish

*Alice Crockett, Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter*

The soon-to-be River Rangers walked on two legs from Riverside Elementary School to the Boise River Bank by Bown Crossing. Master Naturalist volunteers were waiting for the K-3<sup>rd</sup> graders, October 6<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup>, at the Boise River.

On Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup>, the participants were short. They were kindergarteners coming to learn the importance of animals, plants and habitat by and in the Boise River. My props and I were waiting. A white board with colored pens; a crayfish trap; irrigation boots; animal picture sheets; and two (most important) live crayfish. At the top of my white board, I wrote ARTHROPODS! Underneath the header, I drew a ladybug, a spider and a crayfish (making sure that the correct number of legs was visible for each animal). The small groups of kinders walked up and down the river path, beginning at 9:30 am, to pause and learn from six different habitat stations.

My first eager group arrived, still a bit wound up from their walk over. “Good morning and welcome to the river,” I said, “did you have a good walk?” Happy ‘yes’ nods and smiles. “Arthropods have skeletons on the outside,” I said. “Where are your skeletons?” “Inside,” they answered and pointed and laughed. A couple of kids were even wearing skeleton t-shirts and sweatshirts. “Do you know what arthropods are?” Puzzlement. “These are some arthropods you might know,” I said, pointing to the whiteboard. “Let’s count how many legs each of them has! And we’ll name them, too. “Everyone counted 6 legs for the ladybug—I wrote ‘insect’; 8 legs for the spider—I wrote ‘spider’; 10 legs for the crayfish—I wrote ‘decapod’ (an order of crustaceans).

The Boise River was our backdrop and it was deep-flowing downstream. “Did you know that crayfish live in our river? Right out there,” I pointed to the Boise. “They are the ‘clean-up crew’ of the river. They eat and decompose plants and animals from the bottom of the river. This helps to keep the river water clean. Crayfish can’t live in polluted water.” Frowns—they all knew what pollution is. “Come over here and I’ll show a crayfish trap to you.” The River Rangers follow me to a wire trap and a pair of irrigation boots. We talked about how the trap works, what to wear when you’re trapping and what bait to use. Then, the best part! Two live crayfish swimming in a plastic bin of cold water. I’d hidden the bin under a dark cloth in the shade where it was cool. We all walk over to the bin. “Want to see two live crayfish?” I ask. Oh boy, would they! I gently pull the cloth off, lift the bin lid and there they are: brown, shiny, moving...and big! “Wow!” is unanimous. No one wants to pet or hold one, though. “Let’s count their legs, and remember to count the claws as legs.” “Those claws could pinch you,” says a knowledgeable boy. “Ten legs!” And where is their skeleton? “Outside!” I cover the crayfish with their lid and cloth, explaining that crayfish like it dark and cool. “So, we know that crayfish decompose and eat plants and animals from the bottoms of the river. What or who do you think eats crayfish?” “Sharks, Trout, Heron, Lions, Raccoons!” “Are crayfish the same as crawdads?” asks a freckle face. I nod yes. “Me and my grandpa eat ‘em!”

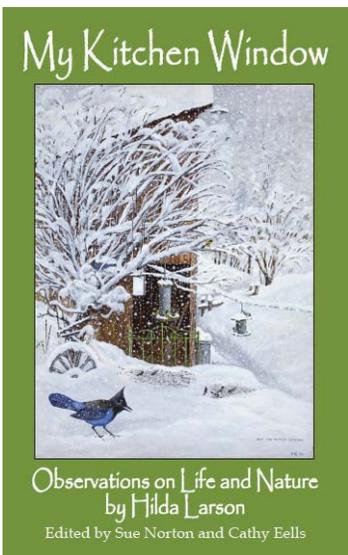
Asides: The tallest boy told about hearing coyotes at night, crunching and eating crayfish when the New York Canal was drawn down a couple of weeks earlier. A curly-haired mom chaperone told about some BSU football players trapping lots of crayfish, boiling them up and eating them. A thoughtful girl said that her pet catfish was like a crayfish because it cleaned up her aquarium for her other fish. And lastly, one determined boy kept calling the crayfish, lobsters, because that’s what they looked like to him.

# Trail Camera Reveals Visitors

*Lori Getts and Clem Yonker (Idaho Master Naturalists from the Pend Oreille Chapter) set up a trail camera and have successfully been capturing images of animals.*



## Hilda's Columns, Sketches Collected



Hilda Larson began writing a column for the Golden Eagle Audubon Society in the 1980s. She began writing a column for the Southwestern Idaho Birders Association (SIBA) in 2007. She also drew cartoons and sketches of birds and birders for the newsletters. She continued writing for both groups until her death in 2014.

Sue Norton and Cathy Eells (Golden Eagle Audubon members) have compiled a collection of Hilda Larson's columns and sketches from the newsletters called My Kitchen Window. Niels Nokkentved did the design and layout. It also contains a history of Al and Hilda Larson's project of setting up bluebird trails in Idaho.

The book will be of interest to people who like to watch birds and other wildlife and those who would like a glimpse into the world outside the windows in Hilda's life. She writes with great warmth, curiosity, and humor.

To order a copy contact Sue Norton at (208) 378-4248 or at [nortonsu@msn.com](mailto:nortonsu@msn.com) or Cathy Eells at (208) 459-4435 or [cathyeeells53@gmail.com](mailto:cathyeeells53@gmail.com). Copies are \$13. Sue or Cathy will mail one to you for \$16. Proceeds will go to the Golden Eagle Audubon Society and SIBA.

# Bitterbrush Survival Study

*Richard Wisner, Idaho Master naturalist, Upper Snake Chapter*

On the 12th of November 2015 a group of 12 volunteers, contractors, and IDF&G personnel, including Matt Proett the IDF&G project manager, planted 1,380 bitterbrush shrubs with and without weed mat, at the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area. The announcement for the project and call for volunteers stated as usual to bring, “appropriate dress for the weather and working outdoors...” One can see from the photos that these words of wisdom are not to be taken lightly. The weather was mostly gray, there was mud underfoot and the wind was blowing. What is not stated, but well understood, is that to stay warm one had only to keep moving, i.e., keep working.

And so...the group planted about 1,380 bare root, 10 cubic inch and 12 cubic inch plugs and finished by about 3:30 pm, including about half an hour for lunch and socializing. There were twelve 575 foot rows, with nominal plant spacing of five yards.

The project is a test to see if these containerized seedlings have a better survival rate than the traditional bare root seedlings. These older seedlings cost more, but will be worth the investment if they survive!

I understand from Matt that on last inspection the plantings had not yet been discovered by the deer and elk. This alone will add greatly to the overall establishment and survivability of the plants, and the hope is that the discovery won't be made for another year or two. All in all, it was another great day in the gorgeous outdoors in Idaho, with a group of folks with great *esprit de corps*.



Upper left: a cold morning at Tex Creek. Volunteers ready to plant.; Idaho Master Naturalist, Bob Anderl not afraid of dirt and work; the whole group at the end of the day, enjoying a little much-deserved sunshine.

# 2016 Sagebrush-steppe Chapter

The 8th training session of the Idaho Master Naturalist Sagebrush-steppe Chapter has begun! The group photo below was taken just after our first lecture of the season. Craig Gehrke from the Wilderness Society came to talk with us about Wilderness in Idaho, the past, present and future! The following week, we trekked up to Bogus Basin for “snowschool,” which ended up being a great crash course on forest management, fire management and managing land for multiple uses.

Our annual social event and awards ceremony was held on Monday, January 11th, with nearly 100 people attending and over 60 Idaho Master Naturalists certifying for 2015! We welcome the 2016 class to this amazing chapter and look forward to an active and productive 2016.

